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ABSTRACT

The teacher working with handicapped children should use play and recreation experiences both to teach necessary concepts and for fun. Motor activities should be sequenced from the simple to the complex. Principles of child development should be applied to help the child learn about his body, learn basic concepts, and accomplish motor patterns. Teaching guidelines include getting the children's attention and planning for successful experiences. (DB)

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PLAY TO LEARN AND LEARN TO PLAY

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by

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Play to Learn and Learn to Play

Children big and little alike are human with all the feelings, desires and needs of adults. I have a desire for a good belly laugh at least once a day and so should you. The children also need a good laugh every day. When all goes haywire, if you can laugh you know you'll make it - it is the umph that keeps us going. Laughter is too often underated and understated; it has an astonishing effect on a person and those around him. An example would be a car with a flat tire. If you were driving along on a Saturday in hot traffic and got a flat tire you would probably be most upset. Now if you had just had lunch with some friends and were having a good time and the same situation happened you could laugh about it as you bumpity-bumped it to a filling station to get it fixed. Well, the handicapped child has a flat tire, so to speak, and he bumpity-bumps it all the time. He deserves to have his road made easier with a few good laughs.

People spend a fortune on entertainment and in bad times they spend even more. They go to movies, plays, live concerts, etc. Our students do not have the ability to scoot off to some entertainment by themselves to escape or be entertained. Some of the students don't even know how to laugh! If we do not teach them how to have fun and laugh we have missed the boat.

The total person is a term that comes up with some degree of frequency. We need to educate the total person. We need to reach the human side of the child, the side of the child that

wants to play and enjoy himself. Roll a child on a mat to get him to laugh and then make sure he feels you laughing with him. Teach the child how to feel good, have some good feelings about himself and that others feel good about him.

The family often has a hard time with their feelings about the child. However, if the family can all laugh together they will be on the road to better days. Families must learn how to enjoy their child, what types of recreation the whole family can participate in together. This should be an important part of the educational process. Play must be taught at school and at home.

For the child to be able to play he needs to be taught how to play. He needs certain readiness skills. But before we go into how to get a child ready, let me give you some facts.

The role of recreation as an important educational tool as well as important life time tool for the exceptional child has for too long been overlooked.

All educators need to be exposed to the term recreation in its fullest sense. The infinite number of activities encompassed by recreation have innumerable uses to the teacher of the multi-handicapped child. Teaching is more interesting and learning is enhanced when enthusiasm is present and the training program is FUN for the teacher and child alike. When one is enjoying himself it is much easier to learn, to comprehend and to remember. A child's curriculum can be taught through recreation, being "fundacational," with the child's learning

process greatly facilitated. All material can be taught through games and activities. Let me repeat, play is learning of the highest order. At the beginning of a child's learning play takes the lead. It is through play that children develop and learn to move, talk, work with others; develop their own curiosity and self-awareness; develop their attitude about learning; about objects and people; and develop their concepts about self. If a child learns basic concepts through play he will continue to learn through play as part of an on-going process. Education needs to capitalize on it. Play is the most outstanding motivator and innovator education has.

A handicapped youngster cannot be expected to initiate a search for good leisure time activities. When a person is faced with limited experiences, limited input and limited access, as many of our children are, the range of choice of what to do in leisure time is limited. They must learn how to use their spare time or it will turn into idle, boring time. People working with the handicapped child know our children have more free time than most children. They do not have the play relationship with their neighborhood peers that a normal youngster has nor are they usually provided for in public recreation programs. Recreation should be part of their instructional education so they, too, can attain a fulfilling and self-rewarding life.

No assumptions should be made concerning levels of motor development required for performance. These must be specifically determined for each child. Progression through the various levels should be based upon successful achievement at preceding levels.

Motor training should parallel present levels or reinforce earlier levels of motor functions. Motor development should result from differentiation of generalized movement to specific movements and the elaboration and integration of specific movements to generalized and more complex combinations. When sufficient control is achieved to accomplish a purpose we say a motor pattern has been established. Greater and more efficient learning will take place when motor activities are integrated with the academic portion of the curriculum.

Structured motor training activities should be preceded with a brief warm-up session, utilizing previously learned exercises. Stretching in all directions provides an effective preliminary exercise. Motor activities may be reviewed throughout the day when a change of pace is needed.

New activities should be carefully introduced so that the child knows exactly what is expected of him. When difficulty is encountered for a child "putting the child through," demonstrating and breaking the activity down into smaller learning units should be tried.

Whenever possible activities should be performed: bilaterally, both sides, BL; unilaterally, one side, UL; cross laterally, CL; and alternatively, ATL.

The foundation for motor proficiency should be provided early in a child's experiences. A well rounded curriculum is achieved by use of physical activities which complement and supplement the motor-visual aspects of formal learning. As with all other classroom programs, records should be kept of individual progress.

One of the greatest means of developing the mind and the body is through play. We take play for granted when it is one of the most important parts of development; it is learning in the highest order. It is through play that children 2-6 learn and develop their attitude about learning; about objects and people; develop their concepts of self and extend the length of their attention span. During early childhood children play in three ways - exploration where they look, feel, touch, and get to know their world; displaced aggression where they shoot guns, throw balls, build things and then knock them down; and kinesthetic aggression where they play with pull toys, splash water, feel different toys for texture. Play has three important elements - it should be educative, developmental, and creative. Creative means the child should be allowed to put himself into the activity.

Parents play a vital role in how the child will play. The home needs to be child proof; it needs to be stimulating but safe. A restrictive environment can be most detrimental to a child. A more permissive rearing atmosphere favors advanced motor development. However, there must be some limitations so the child can function in the family structure. Children are always more capable than we suspect. The more one expects the more a child will do. Don't deprive the child of the opportunity to learn, through overprotection.

Way a Child Develops

Child develops in a sequence. There have been charts made and patterns drawn to give one an idea of how a child develops. However, each child has his own sequence chart of development. He develops in a sequence with some deviation but in a sequence. Children develop from top to bottom and from inside to outside. We need

to work in a logical sequence in order for the child to develop and we need to be flexible in our observations to gear our work to the child and not a chart. We must see what point the child is at and move from there, one point at a time.

Children have readiness stages. Readiness is the term meaning "the time is ripe" or "all signs are go." If the readiness is not there then the child is not going to progress. All the movement patterns we will be talking about are a part of getting the child to a readiness stage. Whether a child is preparing for academics or a physical encounter he needs certain skills and some very necessary ones deal with motoric abilities.

Learning About Your Body

In order to use something you need to know what it can do, which is why we need to know what our body parts are and what they can do. The child needs to explore his parts through games such as "hand jive" and through other little games. Now a good way to find out about your body is with paper balls. The ball can be any size and used for thousands of purposes. The child can make the ball so the threat of a new object is not present. You can paint the balls, make puppets out of the balls and learn basic motor patterns out of the ball. Roll the ball down your face and you feel your nose. Hold the ball in the crook of your arm and your elbow sticks out, etc. This can teach the child about his many body parts and some of the things they do. It will bring out all your creativity in using the balls in many ways. When we get to our list of movement patterns we'll go into more uses of the ball.

A child develops in a sequence. He develops from head to foot so he can catch before he can kick. He develops from inside to out so he has arm control before hand control. He proceeds from mass to specific so he will have large awkward movements before refined and specific movements occur. While the child is developing he is becoming aware of his body and what it can do, forming a self-image. His image is based on how he views himself as a physical entity. A child needs to have as many positive (personally involving and rewarding) experiences in the physical realm as possible in order to develop a good self-image. Everyone wants to feel good about himself. Teach your child about his body, the parts, example: eyes, hands, nose, legs, etc. Teach him the body has two sides, let your child see himself in a full length mirror. Work on a quantity of motor skills rather than the quality. A child from 2-6 has not reached the stage of development where his motor movements are to be refined.

Let a child climb, pulling himself up onto couches and chairs. Let him climb steps but the parent must be with him to see he doesn't fall down. He needs lots of opportunity to practice various movements. After he has learned to walk encourage him to run, then jump. Let him jump from a step or stool or whatever he can jump from. Let the child throw things. Teach the child to catch, the first step of which is stopping a moving object. Play hide and seek with your child. Keep pictures of various shapes and colors in your child's bedroom. One of the very best activities for motor development is swimming. Y's offer swimming programs that are outstanding. One to three year old children learn to swim with their parents and three to six year olds can learn to swim in a class.

Children need toys - toys that are: creative which allow him to construct and invent; toys which he can use for a dramatic purpose; toys that develop an artistic sense; toys that will develop strength; and toys that will challenge him intellectually. Toys should be simple and sturdy but not overly realistic. They should be moved and manipulated by the child, not by a battery. Toys such as blocks, balls, pounding toys, dolls, puppets, finger paints, and clay are some good ones. Children should play with one or two toys at a time. Toys such as blocks should be kept close to the child as they have a hard time perceiving far away. Children need to play on their own and with their parents (as long as the parents don't direct all the play). Let the child show you how to play as well as your showing him.

The main points parents need to remember are to stimulate, educate, and develop their child motorically. They need to safeproof their home, give the child independence, and have some fun. If they stay aware of their goals, the rest will come naturally.

Desires for our Children

With young children we want them to:

1. know their body parts and what they can do
2. learn through their play basic concepts
3. learn and accomplish basic motor patterns

not to perfect the motor patterns but to learn them correctly. Children at this stage should not work to perfection but work on obtaining a good grasp of motor activities which are the foundation of physical movement.

We want the children to develop a good self image. We want them to like themselves, take pride in themselves and to have a good

feeling about who they are. Children, all children have feelings about themselves and if they do not have many positive and rewarding experiences they don't like themselves very much. If they have an enormous number of positive or rewarding experiences without any failures they will stop trying and become bigheaded. In working with children you must arrange for them to have good success with a bit of failure or rather leave an area open that needs more work with praise to push the child on to work.

Basic Guidelines in Working With the Children

1. Don't begin until you have their full attention, try to remove all distractions.
2. Have any materials you are going to use in a bag (such as a ball, blocks or jump rope) This is an attention getting device, often it will hold their interest.
3. Progress from simple to complex activities.
4. Progress from large muscle (gross) motor control to small (fine) motor control, i.e., having students toss a large rubber ball to you as opposed to putting a small ball into a little hole.
5. Progress from familiar activities to unfamiliar activities or start with something the student hasn't learned.

General Principals

1. It is easier to do something in a stationary position, than when doing the same thing while moving, i.e., catching a ball - ask group why.
2. If you must move it is easier if it is slowly over a short distance rather than quickly over a long distance.

3. It is easier to strike a stationary object (ball or target) than a moving object.
4. It is easier to accurately strike a close large target than a distant small one.
5. It is easier to throw, catch, or strike a relatively large ball when both hands are used.
6. It is easier to use a soft ball as opposed to a firm hard ball.
7. Students will get more out of a successful experience than an unsuccessful experience.

The reason for going over all these points is because we often make a situation more difficult than it should be. In starting out make the activity as easy and simple as possible. This gives the child a sense of security and success. Then progressively move the activity to a harder range. We will only get ahead if children learn through play. Our children desire all the fun they can receive.